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ABSTRACT

Community colleges in the United States and Canada share common problems going into the 1990s, including funding constraints, aging personnel, underprepared students, low morale, burnout, collective bargaining, and declining enrollments. Satisfactory resolution of these critical issues and problems depends heavily on effective leadership at all institutional levels. Leadership and perceptions of leadership have a strong influence on organizational climate. At Humber College (Ontario), for example, research showed that the perceptions of leadership expressed by senior administrators, middle management, faculty, and support staff were most greatly affected by variables related to motivation and communication. Findings from the Humber College study and conclusions drawn from other research suggest that if top management wishes to improve faculty effectiveness and the organizational climate, they should work through middle management to effect improvements and concentrate on such motivational factors as using and supporting innovative ideas coming from the ranks, providing support for professional growth, inspiring staff with a sense of purpose, and facilitating cooperation within and across academic departments and work groups. With a positive climate comes enhanced productivity and a greater sense of job satisfaction. (EJV)

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by
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for
ACCC Conference '88
Saint John, NB

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Leadership Behavior that Produces a Positive College Climate: Putting your Energy in the Right Places

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Community colleges in Canada and the United States share common problems going into the 1990's, and at this stage of their development as public institutions of post-secondary education. Calls for accountability, funding constraints, aging personnel, underprepared students, low morale, burnout, collective bargaining and, in some cases, even declining enrollments, are among the factors which confront colleges today.

Satisfactory responses leading to the resolution of the critical issues and problems challenging community colleges depend heavily on effective leadership at all levels of the institution. And this contention applies equally to the contexts of colleges from British Columbia through to Newfoundland.

Consequently, the intent of this paper is to examine the complex phenomenon of leadership and its relationship to organizational climate. We are looking for answers to several questions:

1. What are the climate factors most strongly associated with perceptions of leader effectiveness?
2. Which leader behaviors contribute most positively to an institution's climate?
3. And ultimately, how can college leadership be more effective?

This is what we want to discover. To find answers, we look at the literature on leadership theory and the research on climate. And closer to home, we look at a study I developed at a multi-campus Ontario college operation where innovative and quality education has been, and continues to be, achieved.

Given our rapidly changing world, like many other social institutions, colleges are examining their functions, their missions and their roles. Recent dramatic shifts from a predominantly industrial, production-based economy to an information, service-based society have produced profound shocks and stresses for people to absorb. Compounding these effects has been the rapid escalation of the changes. The industrial age developed over a century; the information age is virtually a *fait accompli*.

Past projections for the future predicted increasing leisure time and education for personal growth. The prevailing wisdom today, based on worldwide socioeconomic growth, is for more skill-based education for all, continuing through life, if people are to have a reasonable hope of gainful employment into the future.

The pressure to cope effectively with these quantum societal changes and the rapidity of their impact challenges all educational institutions, and

particularly, the post-secondary. Writing in an all-Canadian issue of the US Community Services Catalyst, Humber College President, Squee Gordon writes:

> To address these changes and to prepare for the future, the adolescent post-secondary population requires sophisticated training and coping skills; and an education providing new understandings of the global culture and languages, and new ways of production and attitudes towards work. The additional requirement of retraining an aging work force demands different responses, no less crucial or complex (Gordon, 1986, p. 2).

Community colleges in both Canada and the U.S. face problems in delivering the educational services and resources required to meet the needs of a changing society. Pressure on governments for public funding comes from many new sources as well as the traditional vested interests, and colleges must compete with all of these.

In quite another development, colleges can no longer monopolize the field of adult education. Increasingly, the corporate sector is providing for its own training and retraining needs. From the private sector, new proprietary educational enterprises have emerged to compete aggressively with traditional public education.

Additionally, in an age of retrenchment, colleges must also contend with aging staff and faculties who still have some years to work before they retire. Human resource development of college personnel calls for instruction in new developments in pedagogy and technology, as well as changes in their fields of specialization.

In a further observation, as President Gordon (1986) notes:

> tighter governmental regulations, more public accountability and scrutiny and exponential increases in cost and demand for capital equipment call for a strong managerial competence to balance institutional survival with programmatic vitality (p. 3).

Accordingly, this paper evaluates in part, the effectiveness of college leadership in shaping institutional response to the pressures and demands of a changing world on one hand while maintaining and developing a positive college climate on the other.

One proactive thrust which colleges can employ is a program of human resource development. In human service organizations, people are the natural resource. The Hawthorne effect demonstrated that productivity and morale improve when employees perceive that they are cared for by their management. Colleges today have an opportunity to progress effectively by developing their human resources - not just professional development for their

faculty - but development for staff, administrators, trustees, and yes, even students!

Generally, professional development in the colleges is limited by insufficient resources for the activity and inadequate planning. In 1985, the Skolnik Commission wrote: "our impression is that professional development has a very low priority in the colleges, an ironic situation for labor-intensive organizations which are committed to providing state-of-the-art training in rapidly changing fields" (Skolnik 1985, p. 10).

For me, it is sadly ironic that we have no trouble justifying expensive building maintenance budgets, but balk at the thought of investing in people maintenance.

From interviews with about 600 faculty members across the province, the Skolnik committee reported instructional concerns about management of instruction and its impact upon educational quality. Faculty concerns were centered around college management issues such as the industrial production model employed by most colleges, the lack of consultation about major academic policy decisions, administrative insensitivity to factors which are not quantified, and a clear lack of educational leadership at the top.

> Faculty now believe that the colleges are seriously underfunded for the number of students which their institutions accept (and recruit)...many faculty feel that they have been pushed to the breaking point, and that their professional energies are being devoted merely to surviving (Skolnik, 1985, p. 8).

For their part, senior administrators did not believe that colleges were underfunded, or there were any problems with excessive workload sufficient to threaten quality of education. While admitting to certain inequities in instructional assignment, the administrators went so far as to suggest that newer instructional strategies could be utilized to accommodate increases in class size. The main problem in the view of the administrators was faculty resistence to changing their expectations and practices and adopting new methods and modes (Skolnik, 1985, Pp. 64-69).

Against this province-wide background of protracted and acrimonious disagreement and the accompanying alienation of faculties from their administrations over instructional assignment concerns, we have studied Humber College as one CAAT institution which appears to have constructed more positive responses to the problems, and which plays a leadership role in the Ontario system, and in Canada.

While a more extensive rationale for the selection of Humber College could be provided, it can be argued here that the choice is appropriate. Humber has innovative programs and practices in place which address the concerns raised by the Skolnik committee. Where other colleges have forced compromises

which threaten educational quality in favor of certain efficiencies, Humber has managed successfully to maintain innovative offerings, program quality and overall effectiveness.

It would appear that leadership of Humber College at all levels has had an effect on the generally positive perceptions of climate which most employees report. Accordingly, we have explored how Humber personnel rate their leaders at various levels of the organization, with a view to connecting these estimations to the positive perceptions of the various climate factors. Such findings and their implications should be of interest to colleges facing constraints and problems akin to those in Ontario. A glance at the current literature will confirm that most colleges are.

The elements of **leadership** and **climate** found within community college organizations are two vital factors which interact and help determine the effectiveness of these human service organizations. As leadership and climate interact one upon the other, a sense of the organization's overall effectiveness in meeting its objectives emerges.

Where members of a college have been found to have a positive perception of their own climate, they have generally been found to have a positive regard for the attributes of their leadership (Mullin, 1985, and others).

Nowhere in the literature, however, have we discovered an empirical correlationship linking the measure of one dimension with the measure of the other; nor is a causal linkage identified in any study of the leadership and climate dimensions in a community college setting. In fact, one of Mullin's (1985) recommendations calls for further study to determine what causality exists between the two, and in what directions the influence flows. In one important study of the flow of organizational dynamics, top leadership was considerably more influential on peer leadership than it was on group process (Franklin, 1975a). However, the findings of Franklin and associates were derived from business and industrial settings; a study of community college dynamics along these same lines has not been developed until this time.

In order to describe and analyze the leadership attributes and organizational factors associated with quality and effectiveness in a post-secondary institution, my study identified and investigated the degree to which such characteristics were found to be present at Humber College in Metropolitan Toronto, the largest college of applied arts and technology in Canada, a leading, exemplary institution, and the only Canadian member of the League for Innovation in the Community College (USA).

Building on previous studies of college leadership by Rose (1985), and college climate and leadership by Mullin (1985) in particular, the present research involved a two-part descriptive analysis investigating: (1) the leadership styles, and (2) the climate variables found in an exemplary college in Canada.

At this point, some definition of terminology is appropriate. In a functional sense, we can say that **climate** is the prevailing set of conditions at a campus which affect satisfaction (for example, morale, feelings or "tone") and productivity (for example, task completion, goal attainment). The climate of an organization is like the personality of an individual.

In the literature, there has also been some distinction made between the notion of "leadership", and those of "administration" and "management" in terms of the organization.

Leadership is distinct from management, as art is from science. Leaders stimulate the human resources within an institution to concentrate on total organizational goals rather than individual or sub-group goals (Argyris and Cyert, 1980).

In contrast, **administration** is concerned with maintenance, with decisions relating to planning, programming, staffing, servicing and evaluating (Argyris and Cyert, 1980). All activities concerned with facilitating the end results of organizational operations are administrative in nature (Millett, 1969). Administration is more concerned with survival and maintenance of the organization and with direction of activities of people than with change of direction or fundamental concepts (Cohen and Roueche, 1969). Administration identifies and directs the use of available resources; management looks for ways to utilize these resources effectively and efficiently (Cyert in Kamm, 1982).

Leadership has been distinguished from administration by: Argyris and Cyert (1980), who identify leaders as proactive rather than reactive; Cohen and Roueche (1969), and Hollander (1978), who describe authentic leaders as those who influence and inspire greater effort from followers than they would otherwise contribute; and Selznick (cited in Kamm, 1982), who assert eloquently that leadership sets goals and "creates and molds an organization embodying--in thought and feeling and habit--the value premises of policy" (p. 33).

Argyris and Cyert (1980) have contended that individuals can be effective as administrators or managers without being effective as leaders. The last word belongs to them: "Leaders mobilize the human resources of the organization, managers the nonhuman" (p.64).

Our discussion now turns to **organizational climate** - an element which is directly associated with productivity and job satisfaction in the organization.

One model (Litwin and Stringer, 1968) describes climate in terms of how the employees of the organization perceive and respond to elements in the organization, specifically, (1) the patterns of leadership and management practices, e.g. the expectations of rewards and punishments, (2) the formal systems and structures of the organization, and (3) the influence, interactions and expectations of peers and cohorts in the organization.

This focus on organizational climate provides more than a theoretical bridge between motivation and leader-follower behaviors. In practical terms, it

(1) draws attention to worker needs and determines how their motivation can be developed, (2) enables leaders to balance organizational policies and procedures with concerns for the individual workers, and (3) teaches leaders how to identify and relate their own behaviors to the motivated behavior of their followers.

To an even greater extent, and with considerable research support, the work of Likert (1967) recognized organizational climate as a perception of all employees, and as a variable in determining overall organizational effectiveness. His studies underscored the importance of managing the "human organization" because, in his view, these human interactive elements determine most other aspects of the institution. He focused on the systematic patterns of human enterprise and the motivational forces found there.

As such, Likert provided theoretical support for the inferences of this study and others which have drawn associations of leadership effectiveness with positive perceptions of organizational climate.

Having identified leadership and climate, both in the literature and in research, we can now turn to considerations of the field and what my study found in particular. We can sense that leadership affects the way employees of a college or a campus perceive and respond to their climate. But what are the climate factors most strongly associated with perceptions of leader effectiveness? Which leader behaviors contribute most to an institution's climate? And ultimately, how can college leadership be more effective? This is what we set out to discover.

This non-experimental, qualitative study analyzed group data collected from a combination of two survey instruments as follows: (1) an adapted Likert-scale climate instrument, and (2) a Likert-scaled leadership questionnaire. Both instruments measure dimensions which are component elements of the Roueche-Baker Community College Excellence Model (1985).

The climate instrument has been adapted from Likert's (1967) Profile of Organizational and Performance Characteristics, a proven instrument which measures response to six composite "climate" variables: leadership, motivation, communication, decision-making, rewards, and job satisfaction. A seventh variable, group process, was derived and studied from among items embedded in the previous six variables.

The first step of the research was to obtain an overall picture of the institutional milieu from analysis of the organizational climate as perceived by a survey of all full-time employees of the college, by occupational level, and by campus.

The second step involved the measured perceptions of immediate leadership by four main employee groups in the institution: support staff, both classified and technical/secretarial; faculty, both full-time and sessional (temporary), middle management, including program coordinators, division

chairs, directors, deans, and associate deans; and senior administrators, vice-presidents and president.

From these two steps, associations have been drawn from each level of the organization about leadership behaviors and the type of organizational climate as perceived by the employees of the college.

In order to affirm or reject what was reported by members of the organization, analysis of the data attempted to determine the directions of influence between leadership and climate factors. Additionally, the study ascertained which variables in the climate inventory were the best predictors of leadership ratings for each level of the organization.

Utilizing an adaptation of Likert's (1967) Profile of Organizational Characteristics, this study proceeded to measure employees' perceptions of Humber College Climate. In addition to the Likert dimensions of leadership, motivation, communication and decision-making, the Profile of College Characteristics (PCC) instrument included two factors more appropriate to an educational setting, namely reward and job satisfaction. Reward was added because the literature (Litwin & Stringer, 1968) supports the importance of this factor in educational settings; additionally, it was validated in the Miami-Dade studies (Mullin, 1985; Roueche & Baker, 1985). Job satisfaction also finds support in the literature (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) as a measure of organizational climate and has also been validated at Miami-Dade (Roueche & Baker, 1985).

My doctoral research (Kelly, 1986) was a study of leadership and climate variables at Humber College of Applied Arts and Technology in Toronto. This work and related studies of Alberta college presidents (Rose, 1985) and community college leadership (Roueche, Baker and Mullin, 1985) have shown the important contributions of **leadership, motivation, communication, reward, decision-making** and **job satisfaction** variables to the degree of positive **climate** present in respective institutions.

Recall that climate is to an organization what personality is to an individual and that climate is directly related to the degree of productivity and job satisfaction present in the workplace.

My study was the first to correlate the climate variables identified above. In fact, analysis of the data at Humber showed that perceptions of leadership were most greatly affected by variables of **motivation** and **communication** in that order, for all employee groups surveyed (senior administration, middle management, faculty, support staff).

Leadership was measured using the Roueche-Baker (1985) Profile of College Characteristics based on Likert's (1967) Profile of Organizational Characteristics. Perceptions of leadership were derived from the following kinds of operational definitions.

Leadership

- Leaders showing confidence in staff to do excellent work
- Staff free to seek information/help from superiors

- Leaders encouraging and responding to new ideas from subordinates
- Leaders assisting in improving teaching/working
- Leaders influencing staff to grow and develop professionally

The motivation variable which was found to be most highly correlated to leadership and most highly predictive for most groups used the following operational definitions.

Motivation

- Extent to which innovative ideas are used/supported by administration
- Extent to which administration provides support for professional growth
- Extent to which administration inspires staff with sense of purpose
- Extent of cooperation existing across academic departments/work groups
- Extent of cooperation existing within academic departments/work groups

The communication variable mentioned above was almost as strongly correlated to leadership as the motivation factors, and added to the predictive power of the motivation factors. Communication was given the following operational definitions.

Communication

- Extent to which quantity of information supports teaching/learning process
- Usefulness of information in supporting teaching/learning process
- Extent to which administration willingly shares important information
- Extent to which administration communicates positive expectations

Not only were the variables of motivation and communication highly and positively correlated to leadership, but they were the strongest predictors of leadership ratings in that order for most groups.

Now these findings are useful in themselves for all members of the college who find themselves in managerial roles. And they seem to make good sense as well.

However, one additional piece of information suggests that leaders at various levels of the organization should be selective in their use of this information, and put their energy where it will do the most good. Such a strategy not only conserves managerial energy but increases managerial effectiveness.

Earlier, I mentioned the work of Franklin and others who traced a pattern of leadership influence throughout the organization. A glance at their conceptualization shows the hypothesis which one might expect, namely that organizational climate influences leadership at the top, peer leadership shown at the bottom, and peer work groups, called group process, equally. Furthermore, they speculated that top leadership influence extended to both peer leaders and peer groups.

What they found from their meta-analyses of business organizations was a pattern of influence quite different. Organizational climate had its greatest impact on top leaders, who in turn had the greatest impact on the peer

leadership rather than the peer work groups themselves. Now, let us translate these findings to our college settings. The top leaders are the senior administrators - president, vice-president, principals, deans. The peer leaders are the division and department heads, the program coordinators. The peer work groups are the faculty departments and staff work groups in the college setting.

Now, what Franklin is saying, and what we can corroborate to an appreciable extent, is that top management should concentrate on their middle managers to effect improvement, rather than attempting to influence instruction directly. There are indications that Humber College, with 120 employees qualifying for the middle management designation, is doing just that. However, if top administrators want to influence faculty in their group efforts more effectively, these findings suggest they (1) work through their middle managers, as above, and (2) concentrate on improving the chief predictor of leadership and of group process - something which is under their control - the motivation factors outlined above, namely...

- using and supporting innovative ideas coming from the ranks
- providing support for professional growth
- inspiring staff with a sense of purpose
- facilitating cooperation across academic departments/work groups
- facilitating cooperation within academic departments/work groups

In conclusion, we have gleaned from the literature, some sense of how leadership impacts upon the climate of the institution. Our study at Humber showed the motivation and communication factors were most strongly correlated and most strongly predictive of leadership, and that leaders ought to pay close attention to these factors if they want to influence their institutions positively. With a positive climate goes enhanced productivity and a greater sense of job satisfaction. Indeed, at the time, we discovered the highest ratings overall at Humber, were for job satisfaction.

As for the connection between leadership and climate, I couldn't help but include the question at Humber, to what extent do you feel that the climate at your college is "determined, caused or created" by the leadership. The response by the various groups to that question was quite interesting. On a seven point scale, faculty said 'yes' to a level of 5.4, support staff said 5.5, and middle managers said 5.99, all quite positive. The funny thing is that the lowest 'yes' score was offered by the leaders themselves at 4.88!

Well, in spite of the self-effacing administration at Humber, when people ask me if I find that leadership affects college climate, I give them the total impact of my recent studies in two words I learned in Calgary...you betcha!

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